

Statement of Congressman John Conyers, Jr.
Congressional Briefing on Alleged FBI Misconduct in Puerto Rico
Tuesday, March 28, 2006, 10AM, Room 2237 RHOB

Good morning. Today, I have convened a Congressional briefing because I believe that a distinct characteristic of the American identity is the entitlement to freedom and equality. This means that *all* Americans – regardless of race, ethnicity, *or even geographic location* – are entitled to the rights and freedoms that this American democracy affords them.

I am troubled by recent reports of alleged FBI misconduct in Puerto Rico that suggest a denial of these rights and freedoms to Puerto Ricans – fellow American citizens. I thank Representatives Charlie Rangel (NY-15), Nydia Velázquez (NY-12), Luis Gutiérrez (IL-4), and José Serrano (NY-16) for bringing this issue to my attention and for hosting this briefing with me.

Today we intend to explore these allegations of FBI misconduct – not just for the 4 million citizens in Puerto Rico – but for all Americans who believe that the protection of civil rights and civil liberties are at the core of our American democracy.

The events that brought us here today include the FBI's September 23, 2005, attempted arrest of pro-independence, Puerto Rican Popular Army leader, Filiberto Ojeda-Ríos. This attempted arrest resulted in the death of Ojeda-Ríos. Controversy also surrounds the FBI's February 10, 2006, execution of search warrants in its investigation of the Puerto Rican Popular Army. During one of its searches, FBI agents used pepper spray and additional force on reporters and others at the scene. Puerto Rico's Governor, Aníbal Acevedo Vila, believes "there is no justification for the excessive force that we have seen."

Of concern to us as well is the strained relationship between Federal law enforcement and Puerto Rico law enforcement. These two entities – that should be working together to ensure law and order in

Puerto Rico – are now embroiled in a lawsuit. Last Friday, Puerto Rico's Department of Justice brought suit against the FBI and DOJ for allegedly obstructing Puerto Rico's Department of Justice investigations into the September and February incidents.

Today we will explore these concerns and issues by (1) first examining the history of FBI misconduct in Puerto Rico. The COINTELPRO culture in Puerto Rico since the 1950's may be responsible for today's troubled relationship between the FBI and Puerto Ricans. (2) Second, we will better assess if the FBI's conduct during the September and February incidents was reasonable and warranted. And (3) third, we will discuss how Puerto Rico and Federal law enforcement can work together in the future, as I am confident that both entities would like a positive resolve to this matter.

Today's briefing promises to be informative and productive. Before the first panel is introduced, Members are invited to give opening statements.